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ABSTRACT

This document contains five papers from a symposium on advances in qualitative research in human resource development (HRD). "Case Study and Its Virtuoso Possibilities" (Verna J. Willis) asserts that the case study method is particularly well suited for research in HRD because its creative and investigative possibilities have not yet been limited by exclusionary criteria and because it allows researchers to combine traditions of inquiry from the arts and sciences with newer social science-based investigative methods. In "The Promise of Narrative Research in HRD" (Ann K. Brooks), narrative analysis is described as a useful hermeneutic strategy for analyzing data on organizational change or learning. "HRD Theory Building through Qualitative Research" (Carol D. Hansen) argues that, in a field as young as HRD, the primary role of qualitative research should be to generate sorely needed new doctrine and that the principles of grounded theory should be used in research in HRD. "Updating the Critical Incident Technique after Forty-Four Years" (Andrea D. Ellinger, Karen E. Watkins) examines changes in the Critical Incident Technique since it was first articulated by Flanagan in 1954 and offers a constructivist approach as a way of updating the technique. "A Feminist Approach to HRD Research" (Laura L. Bierema) asks HRD researchers to challenge assumptions and promote alternative research designs by applying a feminist perspective. (MN)

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10 Advances in Qualitative Research

**Chair: Hallie Preskill, University of New Mexico**

Case Study and Its Virtuoso Possibilities
*Verna J. Willis, Georgia State University*

The Promise of Narrative Research in HRD
*Ann K. Brooks, University of Texas at Austin*

HRD Theory Building Through Qualitative Research
*Carol D. Hansen, Georgia State University*

Updating the Critical Incident Technique After Forty-Four Years
*Andrea D. Ellinger, Pennsylvania State University-Harrisburg*
*Karen E. Watkins, University of Georgia*

A Feminist Approach to HRD Research
*Laura L. Bierema, Michigan State University*

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V Willis A Ellinger
A Brooks L Bierema
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**March 4 - March 8, 1998**
**Oak Brook, IL**

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# Case Study and Its Virtuoso Possibilities

*Verna J. Willis*
*Georgia State University*

***A major advantage of case study is that its creative and investigative possibilities have not been neo-positivistically bounded by exclusionary criteria, and it is still possible to combine honored traditions of inquiry that come from the arts and sciences as well as from the newer social science literatures. The HRD world is full of cases simply begging to be studied , and the ways we study these are limited only by our willingness to use our virtuosity as scholars, to find best possible explanations for what we hear, observe, read, and intuit –in context–about the phenomena of interest to us as researchers and of concern to other stakeholders.***

There is no lack of agreement among scholars that research worth doing must contribute to knowledge, be meaningful to potential users, and have implications for changing the world we live in, in some constructive way. What is far more difficult for us to agree upon is how research methods are legitimized. This is by no means a trivial matter, and in recent years that have shaken our faith in cumulative science, we are increasingly unwilling to wait for the weight of incremental quantitative evidence to inform decisions that need to be made "yesterday."

It may be that quantitative research has run afoul of its own exclusive claims to scientific legitimacy, and as a result, can tell us far less than we need to know. Now it is troubling that many who have taken up the flag for qualitative research have also fallen into the habit of narrowly prescribing what it takes to do "scientific" qualitative study. For example, scholars like Schwartz & Jacobs (1979) and Van Maanen, Dabbs, & Faulkner (1982) endorsed two conditions which, if present, would enable us to judge whether a piece of research is legitimately "qualitative": 1) the detailed, close-up observation of the natural world by the investigator, and 2) the attempt to avoid prior commitment to any theoretical model. These are clearly exclusionary criteria, built on the assumption that qualitative means only "ethnomethodological" and limiting by such rule-making what the qualitative researcher should attempt to do. But as Silverman (1993) has said, "Qualitative research can cover a vast range of research styles and can even be co-opted back into the positivist tradition " (p. 23). There seems to be a danger that once again, the codification of a particular way of looking at research can be blinding, ruling out legitimate inquiry that does not quite fit the rule-like conventions that are developing. It is like telling a musician that a composition is to be played one way, and one way only, when in fact, it can and should be interpreted by the performing virtuoso according to his own technical skill, mental set, emotional sensitivity, and rigorous re-evaluation of each musical element.

We are slowly coming around to the persuasion that research is an art, as much as it is a scientific enterprise (Sandelowski, 1994). It is a performing art, and it does not pretend to be the perceived reality or multiple realities it is trying to explain. There is art that has integrity (i.e., it is holistic and both intellectually and emotionally unpretentious), and there is art that does not. There is science that has integrity, and science that does not. It is not the presence or absence of practice conventions or "rules" that make all the difference, but rather the artist's or the scientist's knowledge, intention and conscientiousness in performing either art and science--and often a combination of the two-- as well and as honestly as they possibly can.

It is integrity , as defined above, that fundamentally grounds the issues of reliability and validity-- and not whether specific rules have been adhered to. It is liberating to understand that there are different ways to perform science with integrity. Different terms may be used to describe similarities in the way we go about safeguarding that integrity , but these terms have their own shades of meaning depending on the research situations involved. This does not mean that "anything

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goes," as critics sometimes charge, but it does mean that legitimate modes of inquiry are more various than we have often been led to believe. It also means that staking claims to integrity (producing our final reports) necessarily takes different forms, depending on what we are trying to learn, and why.

It is simpler and probably closer to the lived experience of researchers and reviewers to view qualitative research as merely widening the stream of inquiry, pushing out the boundaries of quantifiable (i.e., numerical) data gathering and interpretation to admit the legitimacy of text, oral, and observational data and analysis. It has already become intellectually mainstream. As we strive for understanding, and interpretation of *all* the available data (not just some of it) the use of non-quantitative data has come into its own as a powerful and amplifying research strategy. It helps to insure that anomalous data, which is often the most instructive, is not ignored.

Case study does not "fit the rules" if we try to place to it into either quantitative or qualitative "camps." For example, neither of the two conditions stated above (naturalistic observation and deliberate avoidance of commitment to prior theory) necessarily obtains for the case study. It is equally true that, while case studies can be built on the mathematical symbolism called "quantitative data" alone, such a standard also fails to define the case study. Qualitative case study researchers believe that their work shares many of the same root metaphors as other forms of qualitative inquiry, but they do not feel confined to interactionist, ethnomethodological, or naturalistic forms of inquiry. Even their use of textual analysis may owe as much to traditions in the literary, performing, and plastic arts (literary and sacred text analysis; music criticism; commentaries about "significance" in theater and art) as it does to linguistic structuring or cultural themes. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) concede that "In the blurred genres phase [of qualitative research development] the humanities became central resources for critical interpretive theory ." (p. 2). *Meaning*, the particular goal of those who seek to use holistic inquiry methods, has many sources and contingencies.

If it is true that the legitimacy of a method depends upon what the investigation is about *and* what the researcher, practicing in a familiar paradigm, understands to be rigorous inquiry, then what is troublesome about exclusionary criteria is they underrate the decisive role that individual preferences, perceptions, training, past experiences, and even location and timing, play in all research. Case study stands out as an investigative approach precisely because it bridges every sort of paradigm. For a particular purpose, it can be conducted solely by quantitative means. On the other hand, one need not ever leave the library and the biographical or historical archives to produce viable case study results that serve other purposes. Researchers choose to use case study for its explanatory power, but also for more personal reasons. Stake (1995) metaphorically describes the case study as giving access to a "a splendid palette" for inquiry. He adds,

> Finishing a case study is the consummation of a work of art. A few of us will find a case study...the finest work of our lifetime. Because it is an exercise in such depth, the study is an opportunity to see what others have not yet seen, to reflect the uniqueness of our own lives, to engage the best of our interpretive powers, and to make, even by its integrity alone, an advocacy for those things we cherish." (p. 136).

While not every researcher will do one case study that stands out above all others, there is that holistic and exciting possibility. There is also the paradigm-shifting possibility that so-called "thought pieces" such as the articles that wind up in the Forum section of the *HRDQ* may one day be recognized for what they are: case studies of how concepts are linked together in thought-provoking ways to generate new mental models. It is such conceptual modeling that is the research methodology selected for use in this paper. It is proposed that such modeling is particularly useful at the current stage of HRD research development.

It is perhaps our impoverished teaching of research strategies at the university level that makes the rigor of such textual and conceptual methods seem obscure or even illegitimate. The most telling argument for their use, however, is that streams of more traditional research and changes in professional practice tend to take their cues from conceptual modeling. A case in point is the *HRDQ* article called "The New Learning Organization: Should There Be a Chief Learning Officer in the House?" (Willis, 1991) which set off a new HRD practice trend and a series of articles on the new role of the CLO.

**Defining "Case Study" and Deciding When To Use It**

For the novice who is dealing with references to case study for the first time, Stake makes a cautionary distinction between 1) development and use of case studies for simulation and instructional purposes, and 2) case study as disciplined inquiry. It is the latter that needs further expression here.

Definers of case study seem largely to be comfortable with aligning method and purpose, and have avoided the "dismemberment" that leads to "methodolatry... the slavish devotion to method that so often overtakes discourse..." (Janesick, 1994). Stake, for example, has used case study largely for program evaluation purposes, but he speaks to the issue of using different approaches under different conditions. For him the case study is " a disciplined, qualitative mode of inquiry into the single case." It is not built on a shaky stack of generalities. Instead, it describes "a specific, complex, functioning thing," and the researcher is expected to "catch the complexity." The case study "emphasizes episodes of nuance, the sequentiality of happenings in context, the wholeness of the individual." The case itself is "an integrated system." (pp. xi-2).

Stake advocates organizing a study around issues and avoiding tactics that do not fit the individual researcher's style of operation or circumstances. He adopts Smith's notion (1994) that a case is "a bounded system," having a boundary and working parts. Stake continues to use concepts and terms from General Systems Theory (GST) throughout his discussion. A case may be bounded by virtue of being an organizational unit, or it may include parts or all of other systems in the environment as necessary to investigate the issue of interest. A case is a selected observation point, purposively chosen either for intrinsic interest or for its potential capacity to illustrate what Hamel calls the "global in the local" (1993, p. v), through the power of what Yin calls "analytic generalization." (1989, p. 21). The "representativeness" of the case is not thought of in terms of statistical generalization but in terms of possibilities for theory extension.

Yin defines case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used." It is useful particularly when examining contemporary events "when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated." (pp. 19-23). Although he avowedly seeks to "disentangle" the case study as a research tool from the instructional case study, from "ethnographies and participant observation," and from "qualitative methods," insisting that "the essence of case study goes beyond *all* of these," his definition still does not seem to accommodate the library-researched case that he later insists falls into the genre. For him, case study is preferred when "how" or "why" questions are to be asked.

Yin finds five components of research design of primary importance: "1) a study's questions, 2) its propositions, if any, 3) its unit(s) of analysis, 4) the logic linking the data to the propositions, and 5) the criteria for interpreting the findings." He warns that the researcher should always be on the look-out for "rival theories" that might challenge interpretations and provide alternative explanations. The researcher selects a "unit of analysis" that is meaningful in terms of the research purpose. Essentially, he uses this term as a shorthand for picking the appropriate operational frame for the proposed study, whether it is a person, a group, an organization, or a less well defined "entity or event." (pp. 29-31).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) broaden the definition beyond a single site, stating that case study is " a detailed examination of one setting, or one single subject, or one single depository of documents, or one particular event." (p. 58). They also discuss the relevance of comparative or multiple case study, involving conducting two or more with-in case studies and then finding patterns and drawing conclusions across cases by comparison and contrast.

Merriam (1988) defined a *qualitative case study* in terms of four of its properties: 1) the use of inductive reasoning, even though one may start with "working hypotheses," 2) the heuristic possibilities for generating new understanding in the reader, 3) "thick" description encompassing vast amounts of data, and 4) the particularistic nature of each case. She adds that

descriptive data are used to "develop conceptual categories that illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering." (p. 28). Morse (1994) similarly recognizes the value of theoretical perspective, to be used as a "conceptual template" with which one begins, but which one can expect to be altered as the data emerges. In contrast to the potentially misleading view that no "hypotheses" (i.e., beliefs) are allowable before data gathering in qualitative research, Merriam and Morse describe what is perhaps a plainer and more moderate view of how qualitative researchers really operate. We may initiate thinking by forming tentative (though not formal) hypotheses, even as we prepare to alter or erase these with new data. A new dictionary created for qualitative researchers (Schwandt, 1997) also has the potential for misleading those interested in broader understandings of how research occurs. Writing for qualitative researchers about qualitative case studies, he seems to subscribe to the common idea that studies using ethnomethodologies are the only kinds of qualitative case studies that can be done.

**Case Study Typologies**

There are a number of typologies in use. Stake speaks of the *intrinsic case study*, initiated because of the need to know about that particular case. Another type is the *instrumental case study*, which is a research means to a further (perhaps a policy-making) end. *Collective case study* may require coordination of investigation in different sites. Stake's three types may require the use of different strategies. Yin (and others) distinguish *exploratory case studies* from *case studies that test hypotheses.* Yin also speaks of *single case, multiple case, holistic* vs. *embedded case* studies, some of which may require more than one unit of analysis. Bogdan & Biklen mention the *observational* case study as a specific type.

Smith (1994) suggests that *life writing* is a useful type of inquiry for case study. It can involve a number of genres with such labels as " portrayals, portraits, profiles, memoirs, life stories, life histories, case studies, autobiographies, journals, diaries, and on and on -- and suggesting a slightly different perspective under consideration." He perceives that the intellectual problems involved in working with stories, as a mode of inquiry, "seem to demand more of creativity than of technical or rule-governed problem solving." (p. 187). The point he is making is that case studies are at once a separate genre within what contemporary researchers are calling "life writing" *and* a user of other life writing genres. This is yet another illustration of how much broader qualitative research is than most writers in the field seem to acknowledge. It is also a clear example of the way science, the humanities, and the arts seem to be converging toward a less segmental point of view.

**Doing Case Study: Rewards and Pitfalls**

Perhaps the most gratifying aspect of case study research is the expectation that no two cases will be alike, and that no two researchers will be likely to choose the same materials, approach the study with precisely the same world view, or use the same words to write a research report -- even if they worked from the same field notes. The researcher has an interpretive and perhaps a critical voice that is wanted and expected to be heard. There are aesthetics as well as conventional inquiry practices to be observed. The case study researcher is given license, after all, to turn in a virtuoso performance, making it as revealing and descriptively exciting (while sticking to the data) as possible. The purpose here in returning to the music metaphor is deliberately tonal, just as the "palette of colors" Stake finds in case study research is deliberately spectral, and Janesick's dance and choreography metaphor is deliberately evocative of rhythm, pattern, and emotion. All imply interpretive power, sensitivity to an audience, and performer individuality. The audience is expected to participate, overtly or privately, in the case study performance. Reason (1994) advances the thesis that human beings *co-create* their reality through participation, experience and action. Performers, then, are backed up by behind-the-

scenes and in-the-audience ranks of co-creators, even when they are performing as soloists. This is entirely consistent with the qualitative research perspective that the reader participates in the meaning-making of any published research.

Case study stands on its own merits; it has a long and useful track record. When it is challenged for "truth value" such challenges are ill-conceived, for case study never pretends to have found "scientific truth." It collects evidence of multiple realities, particularly the realities of stakeholders, so that a new light can be shed on the phenomenon studied. In many ways it is an humble and "non-expert" enterprise, asking for insights that may be useful, not facts that must be acted on in prescriptive ways. Invoking systemic ways of thinking enables the case study researcher to operate conceptually on a meta-level. The meta-level treatment enables us to by-pass the paradigmatic enclaves of interpretation that Denzin and Lincoln have so taxonomically described. (p. 13). Systems thinking is a powerful standpoint for researchers. It hinges on an epistemology of the whole, rather than epistemologies of the pieces. It is the epistemological separatism that made cross-cummunication in the disciplines so difficult, that General Systems Theory was designed to heal.

These are the attractions and rewards of case study research. It is time now to consider the pitfalls --most of which are common to research of all kinds. For example, all research is open to challenge on ideological or paradigmatic grounds, even if the research design, execution, and presentation are impeccable. Criteria irrelevant to the design will be invoked by critics because of their own research habits and beliefs, or even because of politics. "Interpretive truth" is in the eye of the beholder, the "meaning-maker." There are new ethical and epistemological criteria for evaluating research, so criticism may come from holders of these "stand-point" positions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 101) as easily as from traditionalists of many colors. Not everyone will be willing to accept the substitution of "credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability" for "internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity" as criteria for sound research --even if the case is made that objectivity is a human fiction and that, as Cronbach says, "Generalizations decay [and] the more open a system, the shorter the half-life of relations within it are likely to be." (1975, pp. 122, 123).

Case studies, like all research, may have unintended consequences. Causal relationships may be improperly inferred, even when the stakeholders themselves participate. Researchers may confine themselves to a particular methodological bias and miss essential data. They may be more interested in theory-building than in assisting the systems they study, and if so, this is likely to be discovered and resented. While accommodating multiple views may provide checks and balances, data management and analysis tend to be very demanding. Protections against self-delusion are not fool-proof, partly because there are no cook-book designs for examining data that keeps emerging and requiring design alterations. Each case design needs tailoring, and the rules change. As Pant has observed, "unfortunately, sets of rules rarely come with rules about how to look at themselves, how to look at the issue of rules..." (p. 293), and so we have to discipline ourselves to analyze our rules as well as our data.

**A Good Case Study: What Does It Look Like?**

A good case study tells you precisely what "unit of analysis" is being studied, why, and how you are approaching it. "A good proposal is an argument -- a fair and balanced one, but nevertheless an argument -- for the researcher's project....It must be written persuasively..." It also needs to be "clear, interesting to read, technically neat, professional in appearance" and have perceived social benefits stated. Cost benefits (if applicable) should also be stated. (Morse, 1994, pp. 226).

Researchers proceed then by every means at their disposal, to conduct the study honestly, realistically, and reflexively. While there is much talk of theoretical sampling through constant comparative methods, so that one can become more and more confident about conceptual categories and patterns, the intellectual task behind the method is to test our assumptions every step of the way, using as many relevant facets and sources of data as we can find (triangulation).

In short, we have what Stake calls "our own rigors --work to do, methods to rethink, some counter-intuitive ideas to develop."

When the final report of a qualitative case study is submitted, "it must be a convincing argument systematically presenting data to support the researcher's case and to refute alternative explanations." (Morse, p. 231). Where most initiates to case study -- or to any other research -- go wrong is in their failure to explain and track their process openly. The research design should reveal how they chose the case and why; with whom they will talk and how often; what other sources of information they will use; what instrumentation will be employed, if any; what recording mechanisms are planned; the nature of library or policy legislation searches, if any; the nature of participant and peer input processes; what data displays are expected; how an audit trail will be provided; the expected duration of the study --whatever the researcher has in mind for the study. This sets the stage for reporting, as well. Whatever has actually been used to produce the report should be discussed or otherwise included. Reviewers reject a report more often from insufficient information about process than for any other reason. They want to know how you got to the airstrip you landed on.

It is also insufficient to scatter all the "politically correct" research jargon across the pages of the report. Some reviewers tend to see ill-conceived and poorly executed research lurking behind every terminology dump. They prefer straightforward writing that even lay readers can understand. Dreher (1994), herself an ethnographer but also a reviewer of proposals, states that "most research proposals would be vastly improved by omitting the terms *qualitative* or *quantitative* altogether...[Their use] seldom, if ever, adds either insight or credibility to the design and more frequently raises questions in the review process that need not have occurred." (p. 284).

**Improving HRD Research Through Qualitative Case Studies**

As in many other fields, the emphasis on quasi-experimental and survey design research studies have left HRD academics and practitioners with more questions than answers. While quantitative approaches to HRD questions have provided some evidence of possible relationships between variables, the differences between treatments or interventions, or a glimmer of causal relationships between variables, we are still left with questions of why, when, where, and how-- and especially, what to do to help practitioners and their organizations. HRD has provided an outline of the puzzle of what does and does not work; sometimes adding to the development of theory. But what is missing are the puzzle pieces that fill in the picture between the edges -- which describe, explore, and depict real life and everyday practice. Qualitative researchers are beginning to step into the center to find these pieces.

What is needed are several case studies that cut across organizations so that we can begin to extrapolate findings across cases and inform ourselves and our stakeholders of the relative effectiveness and outcomes of various HRD strategies (Russ-Eft, Preskill & Sleezer, 1997). An example is a case study presented at AHRD in 1997 which examined the degree to which HRD is integrated (as part of the business group) in organizational strategic planning. Using within-case and cross-case analysis, the researcher found a continuum from no participation , to use of HRD as process facilitators, to stakeholder input. In none of the corporations was HRD fully integrated in strategic planning (sharing responsibility at board level) although one was moving in that direction. This is instructive not only to the HRD community, but also to the companies that served as research sites. (Conine, 1997).

Silverman (1993) has said that, while academic research by definition has to have theory in mind, it needs also to be sensitive to historical, cultural, political and contextual nuances. It may be exploratory, but perhaps equally as often, it is not. Hypotheses can be and are tested by the weight of qualitative evidence. He deflects criticism from some quarters that qualitative research (and particularly field research) is "relativistic" by focusing instead on what it can do and has already done. It makes significant social science contributions. It does this, he says, by " 1) participating in debates about public policy, 2) providing new opportunities for people to make

their own choices [revealing more options], and 3) offering a new perspective to practitioners and clients" (p. 186). In essence, research that is theoretically oriented need not be practically sterile. In the case of HRD research, the case study may be our secret weapon to avoid the sterility of practice that, if not stemmed, could even lead to our own professional demise.

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# The Promise Of Narrative Research in HRD

*Ann K. Brooks*
*University of Texas at Austin*

*Although many qualitative studies refer to themselves as hermeneutic or constructivist, most qualitative studies are still based on the same realist and objectivist assumptions as quantitative studies. In fact, often the only difference between so-called qualitative and quantitative studies is the form of data and analyses they employ. This paper describes how a single study yields very different findings depending not on the type of data used, but on the assumptions the researcher holds. The hermeneutic assumptions that researchers organize, construct, and develop a story about their data are explored as a more effective basis for researching learning and change in organizations than the realist assumptions that the researcher discovers and reveals reality. Narrative analysis is described as a useful hermeneutic strategy for analyzing data on organizational change or learning.*

Ever since I worked in management development for a large Japanese corporation in Tokyo, I have been trying to figure out how to make direct and explicit links between individuals and their organizations and to understand how individual learning leads to organizational change. In the case of my Japanese experience, I wanted to know the extent to which courses in intercultural skills and understandings contribute to internationalizing the organization.

On one level, this appears to be a training or intervention outcome study. However, on a methodological level, it requires a methodology that can link the micro (individual) to the macro (organizational) level. Currently, most research or evaluation studies make this link by way of inference: if we can control for enough intervening or confounding variables, then we can infer that the individual level intervention we are interested in contributed to the organizational change. However, for research done in organizations, controlling for confounding variables becomes next to impossible. This problem is further compounded by the fact that most outcomes are so embedded in a complex and integrated system that we often have trouble even pinpointing where to locate a particular outcome. Nevertheless, even if we could maintain satisfactory control over the conditions of our research and make our inferences with confidence, we still could not trace how the intervention actually worked to produce the outcome for which we had hoped. Problems such as these have contributed to the increasing use of qualitative methodologies given that verbal data can better capture complexity than numerical data.

However, qualitative data itself is no guarantee that we can any better understand the link between micro and macro or the complexity of organizational change, particularly when the data analyses are based on the same empirical assumptions as quantitative research. What is needed is a way of analyzing qualitative data that reflects the assumption that social reality is both constructed and interpretive. Narrative analysis directed at understanding the patterns of language we share enables us to systematically examine the social construction of groups. Based on an intersubjective understanding of knowledge and its production, narrative analysis provides not only a method that links individual learning with change in larger systems, but that illuminates the process by which that change takes place.

This paper begins with the description of a research study aimed at understanding the learning needed to transition a regulated telecommunications company into an organization capable of prospering in a newly deregulated, market driven, and highly competitive industry. This is followed by a conceptual comparison of empirical and interpretive approaches to qualitative research. Next comes a description of the narrative analysis of the data and what it illuminated about the link between individual learning and organizational change. The paper concludes with a discussion of how narrative research opens new avenues for exploring complex large systems' change in organizations.

**Transforming "Ma Bell": Qualitative Analysis from an Empirical Perspective**

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The efforts to transform the regulated and protected "Baby Bells" of the early 1980's into innovative and competitive companies in today's telecommunications industry provide classic cases for studying the complexities of transformative systemic change in organizations. The purpose of the study described here was to explore the relationship between employee critically reflective learning and organizational transformation (Brooks, 1989; Brooks, 1992). The data, collected in the late 1980's, consisted of interviews with managers ranging from "new hires" to the chairman and CEO, public documents and articles about the company, and participant and non-participant observation. To get my sample, I asked the internal organizational development consultant to give me the names of managers he perceived as questioning the way business had traditionally been done and then acting to change those patterns. I then contacted each of those managers and asked them for a similar list. I interviewed the 28 managers who received the most nominations from their nominated colleagues (Patton, 1990).

To analyze this data, I used Lincoln and Guba's (1985) description of constant comparative analysis as a model. I coded, clustered, and thematized the data. Finding the results of this analysis to lack focus, I recoded the data according to the research questions I had asked. I wanted to know how managers became critically reflective, what the company did to encourage or inhibit their thinking and action, and what changes they had enacted. Analysis according to these questions was far more productive than the constant comparative analysis recommended in the literature. However, I continued to believe that I had missed what was important about intentional organizational change efforts.

One manager's words continued to haunt me: "Trying to change this company is like putting your hand in lukewarm oatmeal--when you take your hand out, all you have is a gooey hand. The hole you made slowly fills in and very soon looks as though you had never been there." Can individuals change organizations? Even if those individuals are very powerful? How does intentional change in organizations happen (if it does happen)? How can we study such complexity without oversimplifying it? What data and which method of analysis would move us past such a heavy reliance on inference?

**Where to Now?**

My search took me to philosophy, systems of inquiry, and ultimately the social sciences. Drawing on studies of cultural systems in anthropology (Geertz, 1979), I became more comfortable with my skepticism and individualism.

> The Western perception of the person as bounded, unique, more or less integrated into a motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures. (p. 59)

Then referring to the work of Alfred Schutz (1964), I came to see that knowledge and information within organizations is socially distributed, or in other words, no one person in an organization knows everything. This turn toward the social nature of learning is also reflected in disciplines and fields of practice other than anthropology and sociology, including physics (Bohm, 1996) and psychology (Gergen, 1991, 1994; Mitchell, 1996; White & Epstein, 1994).

A critical look at the philosophy of science and research methodologies made clear that a blind faith in empirical research with its assumption of a mechanistically constructed reality, clear boundaries between researcher and subject, and a correspondence between language and reality had become impossible to sustain. The issues raised by hermeneutic and postmodern perspectives has forced researchers to ask hard questions: if reality is so transient, our capacity to observe it so hampered, and our ability to express it so inexact and partial, on what basis do we even undertake research and then claim it of any use for the betterment of humankind?

Action inquiry began to seem to be the logical form for research since the methodologies incorporate an understanding of reality as being continually constructed and reconstructed over time, knowledge as the product of both the researcher and the researched, and the representation of research as secondary to its usefulness in relation to action. However, action inquiry is limited in that its practitioners rarely publish what they find. They are more likely to write about the action inquiry process itself (Brooks & Watkins, 1994). Even the most skeptical of practitioners and scholars among us cannot help but question the value of research that does not contribute to a

body of knowledge, even knowledge that is partial, transient, and interpretive rather than universal, eternal, and objective.

**A Narrative Turn**

Our most widely held assumptions about learning come directly out of behavioral and cognitive learning theories. In keeping with both theories, we generally assume that learning occurs within rather than between or among individuals. Like behavioral learning theory, we often assume that motivation is linked to material rather than relational incentives and rewards. Like cognitive learning theory, many of us think about the human mind as being structured by information like a computer, rather than by language. But what if we think of learning as being collective? What if we think of the mind as being structured by language? These assumptions imply a far different understanding of organizational change, as well as a radically different way of carrying out organizationalresearch.

Recent shifts in the social sciences based on work in the humanities have forefrontedthe role of narrative as a part of social and individual organization. The anthropologist, Edward Bruner (1986), has pointed out how cultures are narratively organized, giving the example of how Native Americans have shifted their cultural story from one of adaptation to one of emancipation. In psychology, Jerome Bruner (1986, 1990) has reformulated cognitive learning theory away from its analogy with computer systems and information processing toward a set of understandings of ourselves and our world as made possible as well as bounded by the language and narratives our cultures and societies make available to us.

Understanding ourselves and our cultures and societies as narratively rather than mechanistically structured allows us to look at learning, change, and organizations in entirely new ways. For example, a narrative understanding allows us to think of the present in terms of both a past and a future. Unlike the universalized static structures of realist research, narrative carries within it both human intention and moral imperative. Narrative is socially situated in that it implies both a writer and a reader. This shared dimension of narrative allows us to look at the ways in which knowledge is co-constructed in that others' responses to what we say, our perceptions of what our audiences know and value, and the context within which we narrate our experiences and intentions all contribute to how we tell our narrative. For example, if we narrate our experiences to a doctor or another helping professional, we may construct them as problematic in order to fulfill our sense of our part in a doctor-patient interaction. If the doctor is an allopath, we may omit from our story that we have been drinking particular herbal teas, taking homeopathic remedies, or receiving acupuncture.

Although to some extent our narratives are constructed at the micro-level, we also co-construct them within the constraints of the larger cultures within which we find ourselves. Foucault (1980), for example, argues that people, having internalized institutional mores, become the perpetual evaluators of their own behavior. They become the objects of their own project to form "docile bodies." Foucault believes we live in a society of an ever-present "gaze." The question that emerges for employees and groups in intentional organizational change effortsis on which narrative our normalizing judgment of ourselves is being based? Is it the narrative we want? Who wants it? Whose interests does it serve?

**Narrative Research: The Transformation of Ma Bell Revisited**

A re-analysis of my original data using narrative techniques on organizational transformation at one of the Baby Bells yielded multiple narratives about the change within the organization.

The dominant narrative was the one sanctioned by the organization. It read, "The organization has to change and individual employees are what are stopping it. They will have to get on board." The counter narrative storied opposition to the dominant narrative. It read, "The move to change the organization is just a fad and the status quo will soon prevail." The shadow narrative storied the abuse that was an inevitable companion of the dominant narrative. It read, "Employees who insist that the organization live according to its own stated narrative will be punished." The silent narrative was what most people knew, but did not publicly articulate. It read "This change effort is really about who is going to have power in this organization."

Each of these narratives places the narrator in relation to other employees. Each narrator summons data from either their own experience or stories about the experience of others to illustrate the truth of one or more of their preferrednarratives. For example, a man who narrated the organization according to the counter narrative pointed out how an engineer was made vice president of marketing instead of someone skilled in and already involved in marketing because the engineer was part of the old boys' network. The narrator of this story sees himself as an outsider. In the future, he is likely to act consistently with this narrative. The narrator also sees himself as morally in the right and those subscribing to the dominant narrative as in the wrong. When this same story is storied according to the dominant narrative, it is told as an unfortunate, but rational action taken on the basis of what was the safest course for the organization. Thus, a change that is officially treated as a rational organizational change effort, becomes more of a moral tale involving both oppression and victimization when storied according to the counter narrative.

A narrative as opposed to an empirical analysis allows us insight into how employees understand themselves in relation to others and how they are likely to respond and act. If we understand individuals and organizations as narratively constructed, then change and learning become a process of working with story rather than the more mechanistic approach of working directly and instrumentally with performance or patterns of behavior.

In my original analysis I was looking for empirical facts. Although I claimed my work was interpretive, I now understand it to have been an objectivist and realist qualitative study. I assumed that I could gather facts about how employees learned to reflect critically and how they used that skill to implement organizational change. However, I was troubled by the "oatmeal" story which said that no one person, no matter how powerful, could make lasting change in the organization. I could see that employees were confused and did not know what to believe about the organization. They seemed to believe that if they could only figure out what the "truth" was, then they would be happy to act accordingly. They just did not know which "truth" to trust. Which story was the "real" organizational story?

An examination of the social narratives in an organization reveals the stories by which people are structuring their interpretations of events and ultimately, guiding their actions. If organizations are viewed in this way, change and learning then become a process of collectively altering social narratives rather than planned and rational attempts to influence performance.

## Conclusion

This paper has examined the interpretive use of narrative rather than the empirical use of content analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995) as a way of making sense of data on individual and organizational learning, development, transformation or change. Through comparing two differentapproaches to analysis of the same data on organizational transformation, I draw out the strengths of narrative analysis for understanding how individual learning is linked to organizational change. Ultimately this research has implications not only for how we can monitor something as apparently amorphous as intentional organizational change, but for how we more effectivelycan go about influencing change, as well.

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# HRD Theory Building Through Qualitative Research

*Carol D. Hansen, Ph.D.*
*Georgia State University*

*Qualitative research in Human Resource Development explores the dynamics of work organizations and how individuals interact and affect each other. Recently, it has becoming increasingly important to provide a theoretical framework so that a more rigorous groundwork supports and reflects the depth to which qualitative investigations reach. This paper presents various theoretical frameworks and argues for their inclusion.*

In recent years, human resource development (HRD) scholars have been attracted to qualitative research as a means of exploring the complexity of human behavior in work organizations. HRD professionals, researchers and academic faculty found this form of inquiry attractive because of its holistic and nonmanipulative character and because of its ability to convey the interpretive perspectives of both the researcher and the study's informants. In addition, many saw this approach as less artificial than narrowly focused studies under controlled conditions. However, the enthusiastic embrace of the qualitative paradigm has often been shortsighted. That is, studies tended to be highly descriptive but fell short in using data to build theory. While this form of study is attractive because of its rich descriptive nature (Geertz, 1973), it is the underlying role and purpose of theory that gives it power and scientific meaning (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997). Instead of testing hypotheses, the role of qualitative research in a field as relatively young as HRD is to generate sorely needed new doctrine (Markick, 1990).

The lack of a useful strategy constrains the development of new theory in qualitative research that is designed to address HRD problems. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to offer ideas and suggestions for the development of new doctrine. The importance and use of grounded theory will be discussed and followed by recommendations for crafting and arguing the uniqueness of new assumptions.

## Grounded Theory

Qualitative methods are frequently used in studies where there is no relevant theory to guide the research. While preconceptions are not totally abandoned, the lack of predetermined hypothesizes allows researchers greater freedom to explore new scientific territory. In the process, theoretical explanations emerge as the data converge into dominant patterns and themes. The concept of grounded theory, as developed by Glasser and Strauss in 1967, therefore, uses data to develop new theoretical accounts to explain the topic under study.

Four central criteria characterize the development of grounded theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, the theory must "fit" the topic of study. That is, it must be either related to the problem of inquiry and in some way build on existing thinking or offer theory where none existed. Such links are critical to a field as broadly based as HRD. Second, it must be "understandable" to the study's informants and well as those who research and practice in that area. This point asks if the new theory is both feasible and reasonable. Third, the theory must be "general" and abstract enough to be applicable to a variety of settings. The concept of general is more appropriately linked to the notion of transferability instead of generalizability. This is an important distinction. In the former, the onus is on the reader, who can choose to "transfer" or relate the general nature of the theory and findings of a given study to his or her own situation. Finally, theory should provide "control" of action by proposing relationships among concepts. This aspect of grounded theory emphases its explanatory power. Researchers have likened the generation of theory to the development of models that are analogous to stories of cause and effect (Golden Biddle & Locke, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Other scholars discussed theory building as behavioral rules or axioms (Spradely, 1979). For example, Hansen and Kahnweiler's (1995)

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comparative study of HRD professional and top executives found positional and occupational differences in values, beliefs, causal attributions and priorities. They surmised that these differences created a competitive undercurrent, which lead to the breakdown of communication between top management and the departments that reported to them.

In addition to developing novel explanations, theoretical explanations can confirm or deny a research perspective. For example, qualitative methods are often used in the study of culture. An important cultural perspective is the theory of occupational cultures. This theory suggests that the nature of one's work is a more powerful determiner of work behavior than cultural membership in any one organization (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Research by Hansen, Kahnweiler, and Wilensky (1994) confirmed and added ammunition to this theoretical perspective in their qualitative study of HRD specialists by suggesting that these professionals do constitute an occupational culture of their own. Moreover, their study theorized that the acculturation of HRD professional may be very different and often in conflict with the expectations of their work organizations.

**Developing Theoretical Points**

The task of developing grounded theory occurs in three stages (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997). An HRD problem must be first linked to a body of literature. This link is generally tied to other research that has attempted to study a similar question. For example, Hansen & Headley (in press) contexturalized their study of HRD in West Africa to literature associated with cultural relativity, organizational trust, and psychological ownership.

Links may also reflect commonality of research perspectives, i.e. the importance of societal culture as a conceptual and behavioral referent in organizational life. Examples of similar links might be ties to feminist literature, critical inquiry, or philosophy of post-modern management.

Once the importance of studying the research problem is established, it is essential to highlight what is problematic about current research. Gaps imply that not enough is known or that current research is flawed. For example, Watkins and Marsick (1991) explained the need for their study of informal and incidental learning by highlighting the lack of prior study that attempted to compare this kind of learning under formal and informal conditions. Qualitative studies may also suggest, for example, that previous positivistic research was too narrow and that it failed to uncover critical issues.

Finally, new theory must make suggestions for how a current study will contribute to a better understanding, explanation, and solution to the problem. Showing how new theory can expand or refute existing thinking is where we may be the weakest. Yet, it is this strain of theoretical development that truly sets us apart from hypothesis testing.

**Illustrating Theory**

In illustrating theory it is helpful to think of it as a kind of narrative with its own plot development and characters whose actions theoretically influence the story's outcome. Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to this as selective coding and Golden-Biddle and Locke (1997) call this model building. Stories are helpful metaphors. They have a beginning that describes the problem and its setting. A Middle follows which shows evidence to support change in the form of new theory. Theoretical stories conclude with an ending that shows how the present account contributes to the problem's resolution and the literature as a whole.

Stories can also be told from a variety of perspectives. The notion of different perspectives is linked emic and etic traditions of reporting data (Pike, 1967). The emic perspective tells the story from the viewpoint of the informant and uses their own vocabulary and definitions in the form of raw quotes and stories to illustrate the grounding of emergent theory. For example researchers can uncover an informant's emic perspective by asking their interviewees to deconstruct their own stories (Hansen & Kahnweiler, 1993). As informants analyze their narratives, they reveal much of their own perspective in how they label characters and explain the moral of their tale.

Etic reporting tells the story from the perspective of the researcher. This story account may occur in the form of historical reporting of a case where the researcher attempts to find truth by

triangulating and verifying all relevant sources. The perspective of the researcher may, in other cases, be critically interpretative and philosophical in tone by attempting to link emergent theory with associated literature.

There are also stories that report the "voices not heard" (Boje, 1991). These stories give expression to actors that may have been perceived to play a marginal role in driving the story's plot. Such stories question why these actors have traditionally played minor roles and theoretically asks if the outcome could have been different and perhaps better had these characters played a stronger role in the development of the story. An understanding of such stories is critical to HRD research if the field is to truly unearth its theoretical roots.

Finally, in illustrating theory it is not only critical to use data as proof of how the theory emerged, it is also helpful to use flow charts and other visual displays. While such exhibits are typically associated with quantitative data from experimental or survey research, they can equally show relationships among key variables found in qualitative data. For example, a flow chart showing how one variable may influence another, which then may uniquely effect another is a powerful aid in conveying a theoretical storyline. Likewise, visual displays can show the linear or non-linear nature of related patterns.

**Summary and Implications**

As qualitative methods are employed in more and more studies of HRD issues, it is critical that we remember that the underlying purpose of this inquiry is to build theory. As a relatively new field, theory building is important as we support the field's growth and emerge as a discipline with its own body of scientific knowledge. These points are important not only for the conduct and analysis of present research, but also for the training of future HRD scholars. Therefore, we should emphasize the methodological rigors of conducting qualitative research, along with the importance of using data, so that theory will set a new rigorous foundation for our field.

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# Updating The Critical Incident Technique After Forty-Four Years

*Andrea D. Ellinger*
*University of Pennsylvania - Harrisburg*

*Karen E. Watkins*
*The University of Georgia*

*This paper examines the development and use of The Critical Incident Technique as articulated by Flanagan (1954). The modifications to this technique that have been made over the years are described, and a constructivist approach is offered as a way of updating this technique.*

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) is a method for collecting data that has been widely used in many research settings since it's development by Flanagan (1954). Shattuck and Woods (1994) have suggested that Flanagan's method was a "giant step forward in conducting field studies" (p. 1084). More recently, however, scholars such as Shattuck and Woods have articulated the need to update this method so that it includes a cognitive component in addition to the behavioral components typically associated with the use of this method. This paper describes the CIT method as it was originally developed, examines some of the ways in which it has been variously used, and depicts new strategies that enhance this method by incorporating a constructivist approach in the collection of data.

## A Description of the Method

The Critical Incident Technique was formally introduced by Flanagan (1954) in the 1950's as an outgrowth of studies in the Aviation Psychology Program of the United States Army Air Forces in World War II, where it was used to gather specific incidents of effective or ineffective behavior with respect to a designated activity. It consists of a set of procedures for collecting direct observations and interviews from memory of human behavior and classifying them in a way that facilitates their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles (Flanagan, 1954). Flanagan acknowledges that a substantial number of studies have been conducted to determine the critical requirements for specific occupational groups or activities. Other documented uses of this technique include deriving measures of typical performance and proficiency, as well as applications in selection and classification, job design and purification, training, operating procedures, equipment design, motivation and leadership and counseling and psychotherapy.

This method has been widely used in the field of human factors (Shattuck & Woods, 1994), educational research (Copas, 1984; Leles, 1968, Preskill, 1997), marketing research (Bitner, Booms & Tetrault, 1990; Bitner, Nyquist, & Booms, 1985), and research within the travel (Gilbert & Morris, 1995) and service industries (Edvardsson, 1992; Hoffman, Kelley & Rotalsky, 1995). The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) is considered to be a research method that is "especially useful in exploratory research designed to examine very specific, situationally relevant aspects of managerial behavior" (Yukl, 1981, p. 95) and has been widely used in management research on managerial behaviors (Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, & Weick, 1970; Yukl, 1981; Yukl, 1994). Stano (1977) has noted that this technique holds much promise for speech communications scholars. The Critical Incident Technique has been used as a research method, and has been described and compared with other research approaches in over 700 studies (Fivars, 1980). The general reliability and validity aspects of this technique have been assessed by

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Andersson and Nilsson (1964), and they conclude that "information collected by this method is both reliable and valid" (p. 402). Bitner, Nyquist, and Booms (1985) report that additional studies by Ronan and Latham (1974) and White and Locke (1981) reached the same conclusions.

The Critical Incident Technique is a systematic and sequential method for collecting observed incidents, or observations previously made which are reported from memory. The CIT outlines procedures for collecting such incidents having special significance and meeting systematically defined criteria. As a method for classification, it can be categorized with other inductive grouping procedures such as factor analysis, cluster analysis, and multidimensional scaling (Bitner, Booms & Tetreault, 1990). With such grouping procedures, the researcher "lets the data suggest the system" (Hunt, 1991, p. 178), and a classification or schema is generated only after the data are analyzed. The researcher does not impose a classification system on the data. Unlike the other grouping procedures, the Critical Incident Technique uses content analysis rather than quantitative solutions in the data analysis. According to Kerlinger (1986), the researcher "takes the communications that people have produced and asks questions of the communications" (p. 477). Similarly, it produces stories based upon recalled or observed incidents which are then classified. The five major units of analysis in content analysis are words, themes, characters, items and space-time-measures (Kerlinger, 1986; Weber, 1990).

Flanagan (1954) defines an incident to be "any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act" (p. 327). For a critical incident to be critical, it must make "a significant contribution, either positively or negatively, to the general aim of the activity" (p. 338). Flanagan suggests that the definition of significant will be dependent upon the nature of the activity. He outlines five main steps that form the procedures associated with this technique. *In the first step, the general aims of the activity must be established.* According to Flanagan, the functional description of an activity "specifies precisely what is necessary to do and not to do if participation in the activity is to be judged successful or effective" (p. 336). Flanagan suggests that the general aim of an activity should be a "brief statement obtained from the authorities in the field which expresses in simple terms those objectives to which most people would agree" (p. 337). *The second step involves plans and specifications.* In other words, precise instructions must be provided and specifications must be established prior to collecting the data. Flanagan (p. 338-339) outlines the following necessary specifications:

(a) The situations observed: The delimitation of the situation to be observed which must include information about the place, the persons, the conditions and the activities;

(b) The relevance to the general aim: Determining whether or not the specific behavior observed or recalled from memory is relevant to the general aim of the activity;

(c) The extent of effect on the general aim: How important the effect of the observed incident has on the general aim, a level of positive contribution to the general aim in specific terms and in a concrete example, and the corresponding level of negative effect on the general aim expressed in similar terms;

(d) Persons to make the observations: The persons making the observations must have sufficient familiarity with the activity. Appropriate training should be provided to the observers regarding the general aim of the activity, and the specifications and definitions for which judgments will be made.

*The third step in this process is collecting the data.* Flanagan acknowledges that the most crucial aspect of the data collection procedure is the questions that are asked of the participants. He notes that the question(s) should refer to the general aim of the activity. He also indicates that the interviewer should apply the following criteria to the incidents while they are being collected: (a) is the actual behavior reported; (b) was it observed by the interviewer; (c) were all the relevant factors in the situation given; (d) has the interviewer made a definite judgment of the criticalness of the behavior being described. He also suggests that a sample form be created for the collection of this data.

The *fourth step in this process is analyzing the data and the fifth step is interpreting and reporting the findings.* Three primary problems are noted by Flanagan (1954) in analyzing the data: (a) the selection of a general frame of reference for describing the incidents (this is usually

dominated by the planned use of the findings); (b) the inductive development of the categories; (c) the selection of one or more levels along the specificity-generality continuum in reporting the data (general behaviors or specific behaviors) (p. 344-345). In the final step, Flanagan indicates that the nature of the judgments made in collecting and analyzing the data must be carefully reviewed.

A major strength associated with the Critical Incident Technique is that the collection and tabulation of information obtained in the interview make it possible to formulate the critical requirements of an activity. According to Flanagan (1954), such a listing of critical behaviors provides a sound basis for making inferences as to requirements in terms of aptitudes and training. A summary of the benefits and strengths of the CIT is provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Benefits of the Critical Incident Method

- Emphasis on observable behaviors or behaviors recalled from memory.
- Collected from "actor's" perspective vs. the opinions of outside experts.
- Especially useful in determining detailed situational behavior.
- Develops a comprehensive picture.
- Best technique for developing behavioral criteria.
- Ability to discover both universal and contingent behavior.
- Proven methodology -- used with considerable documented success.
- Generates rich qualitative data.

Adapted from Clawson (1992)

**Variations in the Use of the Critical Incident Technique**

Although many researchers have documented the use of the Critical Incident Technique as it was originally intended by Flanagan, the technique has been modified by some researchers over the years, particularly in the field of human factors and management, to meet specific requirements.

Shattuck and Woods (1994) report that Pew, Miller and Feeher (1981) used a variation of the CIT that incorporated an application-oriented, retrospective method for the prediction of future performance in a nuclear power plant environment. The purpose of their research was to determine the effectiveness of planned improvements to the facilities. However, given the cost factors associated with the implementation of these improvements, Pew et al. selected four events that had previously occurred and investigated them in detail to predict future performance based on data, models, and planned improvements. Another retrospective variation, the Critical Decision Method was developed by Klein et al. (1989) and has been used in domains such as fire ground commanders, tank platoon leaders, design engineers and computer programmers. A third variation, "critical incident studies" (Shattuck & Woods, 1994, p. 1082) was used by Cook and Woods (1991) to investigate the performance of anesthesiologists. In this approach, data was collected unobtrusively on anesthesia incidents that occurred during surgical procedures. Each incident is then critiqued by practitioners to help identify decision points, alternative courses of action, and resulting consequences.

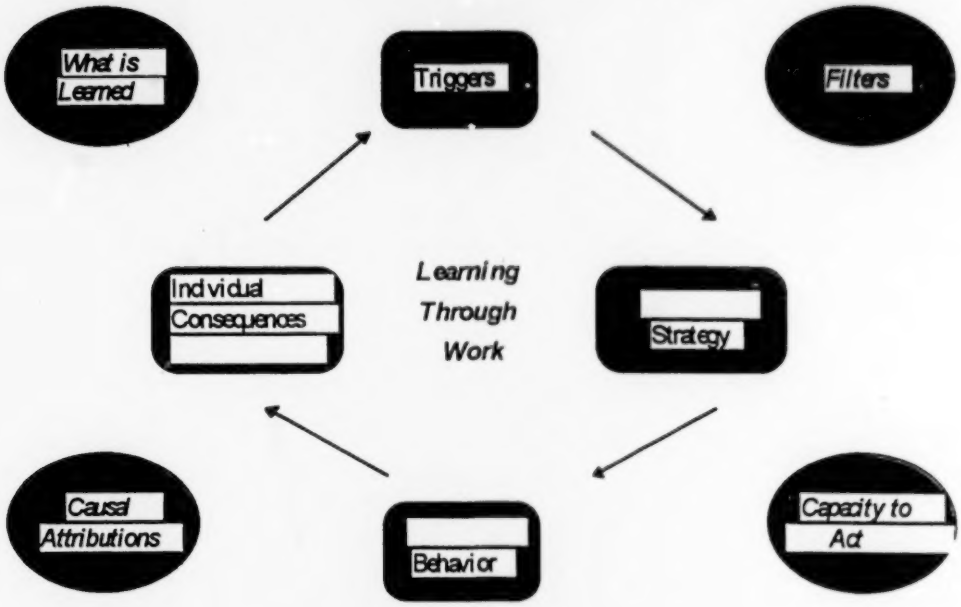
Within the management field, a report by Charles River Consulting (1986) describes a variation to Flanagan's (1954) method by using a behavioral interview. This approach was designed to uncover precise information on the actions and thoughts that relate to competence of high-performing managers. Yukl (1994) describes how Boyatzis (1982) used a variation of the CIT called the behavioral event interview to discover competencies related to managerial effectiveness. These variations reflect the evolution of the CIT as a tool used by researchers and practitioners. Shattuck and Woods (1994) suggest that these modifications in the CIT also reflect a movement away from purely behaviorally oriented research toward an interest in the role of cognition.

**Moving from a Behaviorist to a Constructivist Critical Incident**

As Lincoln (1997) has observed, any research method can be used in a qualitative or quantitative manner, depending on whether or not the researcher approaches the data from a constructivist or a positivist framework. From a constructivist approach, the aim of inquiry is understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that the respondent holds including the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The ultimate objective is to understand the point of view of the respondent from the respondent's world of lived experiences. To understand the meaning and to grasp the respondent's definition of a situation and then interpret it is reflective of this approach (Schwandt, 1994). Elements of a constructivist methodology also include bounding the inductive inquiry within a particular naturally occuring context, analyzing the experiences as part of a complex temporal, sociocultural, and geographic whole, using the investigator as research instrument, and reporting the data in stories or narratives (Schwandt, 1990). These are significant contrasts to the traditional approach to critical incidents where researcher objectivity is stressed and where context, while also important, is treated as a variable to be overcome or as a limitation of the study. In addition, in the traditional approach, the intent is not to see the behavior from within the individual's meaning perspective, but rather to count incidences of behavior to determine patterns and norms. What is significant to the approach we describe here is that one is still able to count behaviors and to detect patterns, but also to develop rich narratives of critical incidents that capture both context and meaning from the perspective of the respondents.

Ellinger's (1997) use of the Critical Incident Technique to classify and develop a behaviorally grounded set of role dimensions for managers who perceive themselves to be facilitators of learning within the context of learning organizations adhered to the rigors of Flanagan's method, but incorporated a constructivist approach. Ellinger extended the focus of the critical incident technique by developing an interview protocol which integrated the traditional behavioral component but also included elements from Figure 1. Figure 1 offers Marsick and Watkins' (1990) model of informal and incidental learning. It is clear that the Flanagan approach will only enable researchers to determine the learning strategies and behaviors. A constructivist approach such as that used by Ellinger enables the researcher to look at themes among the beliefs, attributions, and filters which shape the learning as well as those elements in the context which affect what is paid attention to, what is salient, to the learner. The intent of this approach was to reveal the richness of participants experiences and a deeper level of understanding about the behaviors that formed the role dimensions of the manager as a facilitator of learning by including questions that probed for data in these other areas.

Figure 1. Informal and Incidental Learning




The following example illustrates how a constructivist approach to critical incident data collection and data analysis amplifies our understanding of the behavior as a function of individual action in an organizational context. From Ellinger's (1997) study, a portion of a critical incident interview transcript is depicted. The purpose of this interview was to solicit effective and ineffective critical incidents in which this manager, M9, perceived himself to be a facilitator of learning for one of his employees. The incident revolved around his decision to send an employee to an assessment center.

M9: ....I'll start with one [incident] and it's regarding coaching ..and an individual who I've worked with for several years now and really started some developmental work with that person .. we had sent that particular person to an assessment center and the cost of that assessment is quite high but it's also a very effective tool to use and that person was ..concerned especially coming out of the {area within the company} function which we do that we were spending too much money to learn something like that but at least by her letting me know where she was coming from it helped me to understand that she felt like we were making... an inappropriate investment and what I did at that time was to really sit down with her and really discuss with her what the investment was that we were making and that the investment was for her specifically and how that investment would benefit both her and the company.

*M9: .... the reason it was coaching because of the position that this person has in {our area} and because she {is} so conscious of the financial aspects of the position that the thoughts of that person are more bottom line oriented and sometimes not really bottom line oriented but low expenses possible oriented and that was something that I had already been talking to that person about anyway and trying to get that person to realize that even though it costs some money that it should be a great investment in the long term so I think it was a combination of both developing a development plan itself and coaching ..trying to get that person to overcome the paradigm of the box that that person was in and not think that every time you spend money that it is an expenditure but to think about it as an investment*

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*AE: ....would you classify this as an effective example of you intervening in this situation?*

*M9: Yeah...I think it was a successful example..I think at the time that we started this process and I don't think that that really came up through the interview process that this particular individual was in danger of leaving the company one way or the other, one from her own either she herself might have made the decision to leave because she didn't...couldn't cope with some of the changes that were going on in the business or it could have been a decision that I might have had to have made...and it's been successful because she's been able to open her mind up to a broader level of thinking and she's much more comfortable in the position that she has now and she thinks...she sees things much [more] clearly now even though they are somewhat ambiguous sometimes and she's more ready to accept ambiguity.*

*AE: OK and then when you look back at this situation, did you have any assumptions, beliefs or values that may have affected the way you responded?*

*M9: ...Well, I guess the assumption that I had was that if something wasn't done she wouldn't be here in the long term..the value that I had had was that I believed that she was a person that would be a good contributor to the company and I thought it was appropriate to try to help through that situation...*

This portion of the interview presented above does uncover specific behaviors, the actions or set of actions that the manager performs in this situation, which is the primary component of the critical incident technique as outlined by Flanagan (1954). However, by extending the depth of the questioning around the incident to include elements from the model in Figure 1, we develop a much richer portrait of why the manager executes the behavior, the beliefs that drive his behavior and the respective outcomes for the employee and the manager. Were we to focus exclusively on behavior, this incident would merely show that a manager sent an employee to an assessment center and possibly add that he also did a little coaching around short and long term investments. Instead, the transcript illustrates much more about this manager's concept of his role as a developer of his employee.

In a contrasting example, Yukl (1981) and his colleagues completed a four-year research program to identify meaningful categories of leadership behavior. A sample of critical incidents that were provided by subordinates from one study were categorized as Training-Coaching in their behaviorally grounded taxonomy follow:

> The sales manager went out on sales calls with a new salesman last week to provide instruction and advice (p. 123).
>
> My boss asked me to attend an outside course at the company's expense and said I could leave early on the days it was to be held (p. 123).

Yukl's (1981) examples of behavioral incidents are reported from the perspective of the managers' subordinates, and the triggers, consequences, and meanings behind these behaviors are not captured. The integration of the elements presented in Figure 1 allows the researcher to develop a more comprehensive interview protocol to gather data which extends beyond the reporting of actual behaviors and the constructivist approach encourages a different approach to data collection, analysis, and reporting.

**Contribution to the Field of HRD**

The enhancements to this method may provide researchers within the field of human resource development the opportunity to design studies and collect data that enable them to understand the mental models and rationale that guide behaviors, the environmental factors that influence behaviors, and resulting outcomes associated with specific behaviors in addition to the actual behaviors that are described and collected. With this more holistic picture of both the meanings people assign to their actions as well as their specific and critical actions, we can more effectively intervene to affect behavior.

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# A Feminist Approach to HRD Research

*Laura L. Bierema*
*Michigan State University*

*This paper challenges HRD researchers to apply a feminist perspective to critiquing and conducting research. Feminist research values and assumptions are defined. A framework for evaluating and conducting research according to feminist principles is suggested. A brief critique of contemporary HRD research is provided. The paper challenges HRD researchers to challenge assumptions, work for social and political change, and promote alternative research designs.*

Creating new knowledge is of vital importance to both HRD practitioners and researchers. As an emerging field, HRD is in the process of defining itself as a discipline. Yet, voices are missing from the discourse, and there has been little critical assessment of the field. This paper proposes a different perspective for conducting responsible HRD research and practice.

***Missing Voices*** Like most other social institutions, the process of knowledge creation and dissemination has historically been the province of white men. Women's experience and knowledge has been traditionally excluded or overlooked in social science research. The scientific method has received wide application and is often viewed as *the* valid means of creating knowledge. While the positivist approach has immense value in creating knowledge, there are questions that it cannot answer suitably. Additionally, the positivist method embraces an overt objective to neutralize context and avoid relationships between the researcher and the researched. Westkott, in a 1979 feminist critique of the social sciences, noted that women's invisibility in all disciplines has been a recurring theme of feminist criticism. While there have been improvements, this still seems to be the case. Allen and Baber argue that, "Traditional science has been used to exploit women's labor and mystify women's experience, so feminists must seek methods that more accurately and comprehensively reveal women's lives" (1992, p. 2). Nicolson (1997) suggests that traditional research methods both render women invisible and remove them from the context of their lives.

***Critical Assessment*** During the last two decades, feminist social scientists, particularly from the fields of psychology and sociology, have critiqued the research process. Mednick (1991) charges psychology research with omissions including: inattention to the influence of cultural institutions, lack of cross-disciplinary borrowing, and reductionism at the expense of field and naturalistic research. Nicolson argues that, "Women experience subordination in a number of ways throughout their lives, and their needs are clearly at odds with the aims, practice and rhetoric of mainstream academic psychology which seeks to establish norms for human behavior based upon the white, middle-class bourgeois male" (1997, p. 248). Acker, Barry, and Esseveld (1983) argue that:

> Exploration, in our usage, means an open and critical process in which all the intellectual tools we have inherited from a male dominated intellectual tradition are brought into question, including ideas about the basic nature of human being, the nature of social life, the taken-for-granted world-view of traditional science, what concepts and questions might help to illuminate our shared condition and how we should go about developing such knowledge (p. 425).

To move HRD forward as a discipline requires that the assumptions underlying research be surfaced and research practices be challenged.

***A New Vision*** The goal of this paper is to apply a different lens to the HRD research process. The lens is a feminist perspective. There are many types of feminism and may kinds of research. Feminist research views knowledge as evolving, interactively created and tested through experience. Bologh (in Reinharz, 1992) suggests that its concern lies in identifying

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feminist research methods, and distinguishing them from other research methods. She also emphasizes that feminist researchers differ from one another. Acker, Barry, and Esseveld recognize that traditional social science has relegated women to the periphery and misrepresented their lives. They consequently suggest that "a radical rebeginning is needed in feminist research" (1983, p. 424). This paper will define feminist research, present a brief feminist critique of HRD research, and discuss the potential of feminist research to contribute to the future research and practice of HRD.

## Theoretical Framework: Defining Feminist Research

This section provides a simplistic definition of "feminist," identifies the values and assumptions underlying feminist research, and outlines a framework for conducting feminist research.

***Defining "Feminist"*** Entertaining the many types of feminism is beyond the scope of this paper. A feminist–at the most simplistic level–is a person who seeks economic, social and political equality between the sexes. Feminists participate in and/or support organized activity to advance women's rights and interests. Acker, Barry, and Esseveld (1983) define feminists as engaged in: acknowledging the exploitation, devaluation and often oppression of women; making a commitment to changing the condition of women; and adopting a critical perspective toward dominant intellectual traditions that have ignored and /or justified women's oppression.

***Values And Assumptions Underlying Feminist Research*** Is there a particular feminist research method? No. There is, however, a feminist *approach* to research. The feminist approach is characterized by specific values, grounded in assumption testing, and committed to social change.

*Feminist Research Values* Feminist researchers use methods similar to other researchers (Harding, 1987; Peplau & Conrad, 1989). Subjectivity, personal experience, social context, and relationship between the researcher and researched are valued in feminist research. Harding observes:

> A closer examination of the full range of feminist social analyses reveals that often it is not exactly alternative methods that are responsible for what is significant about their research. Instead, we can see in this work alternative origins of problematic, explanatory hypotheses and evidence, alternative purpose of inquiry, and a new prescription for the appropriate relationship between the inquirer and her/his subject of inquiry (1987, p. vii).

What makes feminist research unique is "defining women's experiences as suitable problems and sources of answers; designing research *for* women; and locating both researcher and researched on the same critical plane" (Coyner, 1988-1989, p. 291). "The feminist goal is to do research that is *for* women rather than *about* women" (Allen & Barber, 1992, p. 9). Lott's (1991) feminist research themes incorporate promoting women's interests, human welfare and the health and integrity of psychology as a scientific field. While mindful of the controversy and debate permeating research critique, she has identified the following themes as important to recognize in designing feminist research:

- Science is not value-free.
- Sizable gender difference in behaviors and abilities have been assumed with inadequate evidence; these assumptions support a status quo of unequal opportunity and power.
- Gender is a cultural construction and an ongoing process.
- Women's lives provide rich sources of information for study; research must focus on human beings, not just men, college students, heterosexuals, or middle-class European Americans.
- Gender is not just a participant characteristic but a significant stimulus variable.
- Psychological research always has social implications which should be recognized and stated openly; feminist objectives include and equitable society.
- There is always a relationship between the researcher and the persons researched.

- Multiple methods yield a wide range of information.
- There is always a social, political, and historical context to be considered in understanding the origin of research questions and in interpreting data (pp. 508-510).

*Assumption Testing* Bologh asserts that feminist researchers "question and challenge the implicit male perspective of the dominant paradigms, ethnological strictures, and theoretical assumptions of the various disciplines" (1984, p. 388). Feminist research questions the assumptions behind research from the question posed to the implications drawn. U.S. sociologist Mednick (1991) demands that feminist research critique how assumptions about women's true nature affect the method, concepts, and application of knowledge. She challenges researchers to investigate topics that have been neglected because of bias about women and to consider how academic disciplines are affected by neglecting women and other oppressed groups in research.

*Relationships between the Researcher and the Researched* Acker, Barry, and Esseveld note that "a feminist methodology must, therefore, deal with the issues of objectivity in social science and, in the process, deal also with the issue of the relationship between the researcher and the researched" (1983, p. 425). Feminist researchers acknowledge that both the researcher and the researched are sources of data, both may be changed due to the research, and the relationship between the two may be an important data source. Feminists strive not to exploit research participants, but rather to make the process liberating.

*Social Change* Feminist research can be regarded as systemic, as it attempts to analyze and influence social phenomenon on a large scale. Reinharz (1992) notes that feminist research is connected to both social change and social policy questions. Further, feminist research is concerned with social justice, not only for women, but for other oppressed groups in society. Lott (1991) identified four basic assumptions and values shared among feminist psychologists. They include:

1. Recognition of the patriarchal, sexist nature of most aspects of contemporary life and social institutions.
2. Recognition of the negative consequences of gender inequities in power.
3. Focus on the entire range of women's experiences.
4. Efforts for change in alliance with others to eliminate barriers to resources based on gender, ethnicity, class, and other social categories (p. 508).

Feminists work to change the asymmetrical power relationships in organizations and society.

***A Framework For Conducting Feminist Research*** Worell (1996) notes that feminist psychologists introduced a dialogue that challenged prevailing structures of knowledge creation. Worell and Etaugh (1994), synthesized feminist theory and research in psychology and other disciplines to establish "Themes and Sample Variations in Feminist Research." Worell adapted the list and suggests that feminist research:

1. Challenges traditional scientific inquiry.
2. Focuses on the experiences and lives of women.
3. Considers asymmetrical power arrangements
4. Recognizes gender as an essential category of analysis
5. Attends to language and the power to "name"
6. Promotes social activism and societal change (1996, p. 476)

These themes will be applied in a critique of HRD research. The critique presented in this paper is preliminary. A more exhaustive critique of AHRD proceedings and HRD research articles is underway.

## Feminist Critique of HRD Research

Feminist criticism seeks to end oppression by critically evaluating a phenomenon (such as research), challenging underlying assumptions, and proposing alternatives. Feminist criticism questions perspectives that censure or ignore groups in society. Feminist research is concerned not only with women, but also with the oppression of all people. Fine (1985) suggests that

feminist researchers should analyze samples, contexts studied, outcomes measured and conclusions drawn. Lykes and Stewart (1986) observe that "Methodology emerges as the gatekeeper of mainstream psychological research, the point of most resistance and least change" (p. 408). McHugh, Koeske, and Frieze (1986) note three major types of barriers to sex-fair research: Excessive confidence in traditional methods, bias in explanatory systems, and inappropriate conceptualization and operationalization. Denmark, Russo, Frieze, & Sechzer (1988) recommend that gender bias be eliminated at all stages of research including: question formulation, research design, data analysis and interpretation and conclusion formation. This section provides a brief critique of HRD research based on question formulation, research design, and Worell's (1996) framework.

***Question Formulation*** Research questions have traditionally been conceptualized without consideration of women (Fine, 1985; Lykes & Stewart, 1986; Unger, 1983). A quick reading of HRD research reveals an agenda driven by management interests focused primarily on learning and performance. Learning and performance are vitally important to HRD research. The research question formulation, however, overlooks the impact of power, oppression, and organizational relationships on learning and performance.

Leimbach and Baldwin (1997) identify the characteristics of effective HRD research as being customer driven, linked to value creation, short in duration, and rigorous. While Leimbach and Baldwin's characteristics are important in HRD research, there are several omissions. There is no reference to addressing issues related to women and minorities, diversity, power relationships, social context or social and political change. Employees are not even mentioned in the characteristics. Although organization power holders control the demand for HRD services and are important in the HRD system, they are not the only members. Organizations participate in society and impact employees, communities and the environment. HRD's challenge related to question formulation is to take a more systemic focus that considers all members of a social system, and topics beyond performance and learning.

***Research Design*** A wide variety of research designs is used in HRD. However, the positivist methodology is favored among many researchers. Holton and Burnett observe, "Quantitative methods and the scientific method are the foundation of modern science. . . .This approach has a rich tradition and has contributed a substantial portion of the knowledge in human resource development" (1997, p. 65). Feminist research proposes expanding the methods and voices of knowledge creation.

*Sample Populations* As in question formulation, HRD research is biased in sample selection. There tends to be an executive/managerial focus. This orientation is not surprising since these groups posses organizational power, control resources, and stand to benefit from research. Two recent books have dealt with HRD research. Each book has either provided abstracts or full text of what the authors consider to be exemplary HRD research (Russ-Eft, Preskill, & Sleezer, 1997; Swanson & Holton, 1997). Neither book identifies studies that investigated women as a unit of analysis. Women are absent in problem formulation, research design, data analysis and future implications. Biased selection such as this serves to exclude women, minorities and employee groups with less power in organizations. It also prevents HRD researchers and practitioners from gaining a full understanding of the organizational context.

*Methodology* Unger (1983), asserts that research is affected by embedded models of reality that impact question selection, causal factors hypothesized, and data interpretation. She accuses social scientists of working to "sustain the illusion that knowledge is abstract and value-free" (p. 13). This perspective excludes many voices from the knowledge creation process, and in turn, maintains the existing power relationships and interests of the power holders in society. The methodology is not under Unger's critique as much as the unawareness of the implications of the epistemological commitments made through non-critical selection of research tools. Feminist research advocates the use of multiple methods, instead of over reliance on experimental, quantitative methods.

*Data Analysis* Although HRD research populations regularly include women and minorities, data analysis often fails to address gender or oppressed status as an important unit of investigation. Further, the social and political contexts are often controlled or ignored in

traditional research. Failure to capture richness, context and multiple perspectives in analysis is another feminist criticism of social science research. Unger critiques the positivist empiricist research model as it "restrict[ing] analysis to a few clearly observable units of behavior in order to avoid imposing one's own beliefs upon the organism's studied" (1983, pp. 10-11). The challenge for HRD researchers is to more comprehensively analyze data. This will promote learning about women, oppressed groups and social context.

*Interpretation and Conclusion Formation* HRD researchers need to take their conclusions a step further when considering findings. How do the findings impact women and other oppressed groups? What are the implications for organizational or social change?

***A Brief Critique of HRD Research*** McLean and Russ-Eft identified nine "examples of excellent HRD research" in the 1997 *HRD Research Handbook*. These studies were published between 1992-1995. McLean and Russ-Eft established that the studies selected were not "perfect," and emphasized that they represented a wide array of topics and methodologies. These "excellent" studies addressed issues including: continuous quality improvement, cross-cultural human resource development, performance feedback, organization learning, behavioral modeling, interpersonal-skills training, computer-based interventions, transfer of training, performance prediction, team building, learning, design, performance and development. Two of the nine studies sampled business students. The sample populations for the others included managers, team members and training participants. By analyzing this small selection of studies against Worell's (1996) six points framing feminist research we can establish that: (1) Some of the studies challenged traditional scientific inquiry (Brooks,1994; DiBella,1993; and Rowe, 1995). (2) None of the studies focused on the experiences and lives of women. (3) Asymmetrical power arrangements were considered by one study (Brooks, 1994). (4) Gender was not recognized as an essential category of analysis in any of the studies, not even those with a significant population of women. (5) Worell and Etaugh (1994) identify "attending to language and the power to name" as the willingness to address undiscussables such as sexual harassment, discrimination, or violence against women. None of the studies ventured into this area. (6) Finally, none of the studies promoted social activism or societal change.

Russ-Eft, Preskill and Sleezer co-authored the 1997 book *Human Resource Development Review: Research and Implications*. The studies highlighted in this book were published between 1990 and 1995. They overlap significantly with McLean and Russ-Eft's selection of "excellent" studies. Russ-Eft, Preskill and Sleezer selected studies based on the following characteristics:

- A well-grounded theoretical framework
- An appropriate mode of inquiry
- A systematic approach to research
- A well-executed methodology
- A well-grounded analysis and interpretation
- An original contribution to the field
- A clear and well-organized written presentation
- An appeal to a large audience

This collection of studies is organized according to individual learning and performance, team learning and performance, and organizational learning and performance. This structure situates the research inquiry solidly in the realm of corporate settings with a focus on organizational performance and learning. There are no studies related to women in this collection. Two of the fifteen studies in this book address power in organizations. There are also articles related to cross-cultural issues. A striking characteristic of this collection is the diversity of qualitative research designs.

Admittedly, this brief critique does not capture the vast amount of HRD research. Yet, considering that these are the most comprehensive, current guides to HRD research, the omissions are startling. Indeed, the books provide useful models of research and fill a previously vacant niche in HRD literature. The research books stop short of truly challenging the assumptions HRD researchers bring to their studies. They fail to include many HRD contexts beyond industrial, corporate organizations. Diverse voices are not heard. A feminist research perspective provides the framework to represent diversity in research and explore issues beneath the surface of organization performance and learning.

## The Challenge of Feminist HRD Research

Just as there are many feminisms, so too are there many types of feminist research. The purpose of this paper is not to argue for one feminist methodology, but rather to challenge HRD researchers to approach the knowledge creation process more critically. DeVault noted that, "the dilemma for the feminist scholar, always, is to find ways of working within some disciplinary tradition while aiming at an intellectual revolution that will transform the tradition" (in Burke, 1978, p. 855). In the spirit of DeVault, this section highlights the possibilities feminist research provides including: challenging assumptions, working for social and political change, and promoting alternative research designs.

***Challenging Assumptions*** Feminist research provides a framework for alternative knowledge creation. Feminist researchers challenge the traditional roles of researcher and subject. Feminist researchers engage in criticism of nonfeminist scholarship and challenge such scholars with working toward scholarship that is guided by feminist theory. Harding (1987) suggests that feminist analyses add three elements to the knowledge base. The first is valuing women's experiences as new empirical and theoretical resources. Through this inquiry, women's experience becomes a resource for social analysis. Another contribution is research for women. Here the objective is to provide explanations for women about social phenomena that women both want and need. The third attribute is providing a new subject matter of inquiry by locating the researcher in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter. In essence this involves women studying themselves.

Asking new questions is an important role in critiquing existent HRD research and in creating future studies (McHugh, Koeske, and Frieze, 1986). Strudler Wallston (1981) notes that asking questions is undervalued in the research process. HRD researchers can apply action learning to research by asking new questions to test and surface their assumptions. What are the benefits of feminist research? The risks? How critical are HRD researchers of their methods? How do we integrate multiple voices into HRD research? How does research reproduce systems of oppression versus challenge them? What is the responsibility of HRD researchers to evaluate their practice? What impact do omissions in research have on HRD theory and practice?

***Working for Social and Political Change*** Feminist criticism is a "mode of praxis....[Its] point is to change the world" (Schweickart, 1986,p. 38). The social change agenda is overt among feminist researchers. HRD researchers can benefit by stepping back and assessing how or if HRD research contributes to social and political change, versus reinforcing the status quo. Feminist researchers are interested in how new knowledge can equalize asymmetrical power relationships. Research in the areas of team dynamics and organizational learning hold great promise for expanding feminist research in HRD.

***Promoting Alternative Research Designs*** Reinharz (1992) offers a framework for feminist research. Like Harding (1987), she also emphasizes that feminism is a perspective, not a method. "Feminist research" is less about a particular method, and more concerned with how we ask questions, what agendas we pursue and whether or not change is facilitated. Feminists embrace all modes of inquiry including well-known research methods such as: interviews, ethnography, survey research and statistical analysis, experimental studies, cross-cultural studies, oral history, content analysis, case studies, and action research. Feminists also apply uniquely feminist methods (see Reinharz, 1992) such as: consciousness raising, group diaries, scale creation, drama, genealogy and network tracing, multiple narrative, conversation/dialogue, intuition, identification, personal experience, structured conceptualization, photography, and self-interviewing.

Worell (1991) advocates greater diversity among research populations including analysis based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, and status. Even research done on women lacks diversity. Mednick points out that "It seems that we are aware that we are studying only majority-group middle class women, but we do not know how to get out of the box" (1991, p. 616). She argues that this neglect is damaging the conceptual development and research practice of the field and must be corrected.

While there are challenges to doing feminist research, Lott (1991, pp. 514-515) predicts that the feminist perspective will function similarly to systems theory as a lens through which to view and critique research and theory. She predicts that the future will yield:

1. A reduction in implicit bias with a tendency toward thinking differently about research with a greater willingness to share undiscussable assumptions.
2. Growing acceptance of multiple methods for discovering knowledge
3. Increased interest in equality and social justice.
4. The use of multiple research methods in multiple contexts
5. Gender will be recognized as an important level of analysis.

## Conclusion

This paper defined feminist research, evaluated HRD research, and proposed some tactics for conducting feminist HRD research. HRD is an important and emerging field with a rich tradition of research. Swanson (1997) charges that, "Atheoretical practice is practice that occurs without the guidance of theory" (p. 4). Swanson makes an important point. The feminist question is, "Theory for whom, by whom?" This is a relevant issue throughout the research process. As researchers, we have a responsibility to critically evaluate our questions, methods and findings. We have an additional responsibility of assessing the impact HRD research has on performance, learning, employee well-being and social welfare. Is HRD research increasing opportunities for women and minorities in organizations? Is the work of HRD impacting the environment in a positive fashion? Whose voice is being heard in the scholarly discourse? The benefits of a feminist perspective include that it is emancipatory in nature, concerned with issues of social justice not only for women, but also for oppressed minorities and social groups. The feminist perspective is change-oriented, seeking to equalize power relations that often lead to oppression of various groups in society. The feminist approach offers HRD, as a relatively new field, the opportunity to apply multiple, socially responsible approaches to increasing the knowledge base.

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